



McGill

School of
Social Work

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Field Friday

Topic: Writing Case Notes



McGill

School of
Social Work

Field Education

FIELD FRIDAYS

**PRACTICE SKILLS LAB
BEGINNING IN JANUARY**

EVERY FRIDAY

🕒 1:30-2:30pm

**Topics discussed
will include:**

- Professional Note Writing
- Interview Skills
- Assessment Skills

BRIDGING
theory and
PRACTICE



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What is generally included in a Case Note?

- What happened/is happening?
 - Why do we think it happened/is happening?
 - What are we going to do about it?
-
- Why do we need case notes?
 - What do you include in your case notes at your respective agency?
 - What does the order have to say about case notes?

OTSTCFQ General Standards of Practice

2.2. “Depending on the situation at hand, social workers collect relevant objective and subjective information about clients and their environment, in particular: their situation, expectations, needs, aspirations in addition to their perception of the situation and personal and environmental factors (immediate and societal environment). Particular attention is paid to social determinants, social roles and people’s strengths” (OTSTCFQ, 2019)

Social Determinants of Health

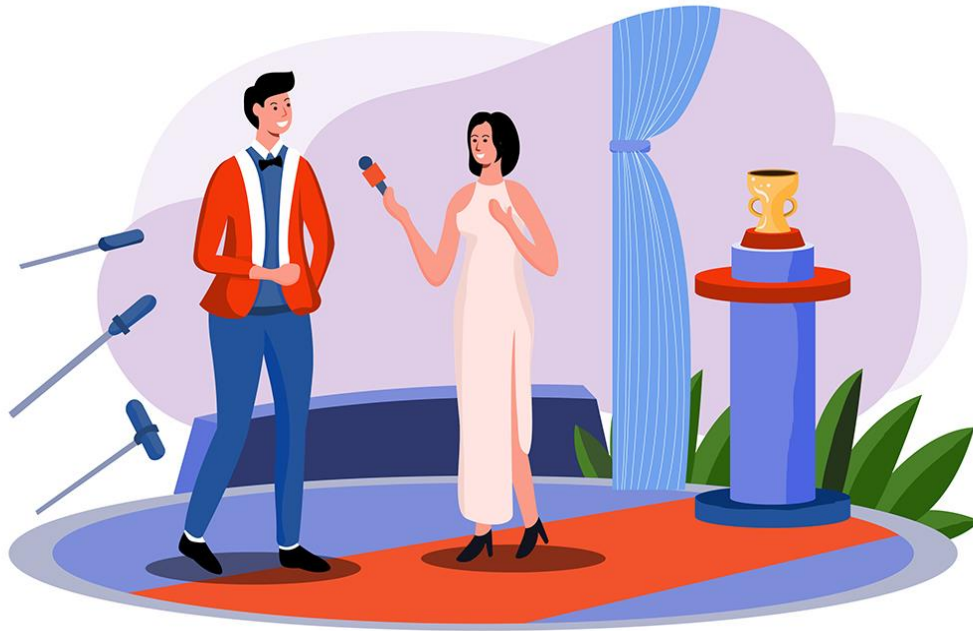
According to WHO (2022), The social determinants of health (SDH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems.



based on work for First Nations Health Authority at Gathering Wisdom VI

Drawing
Change

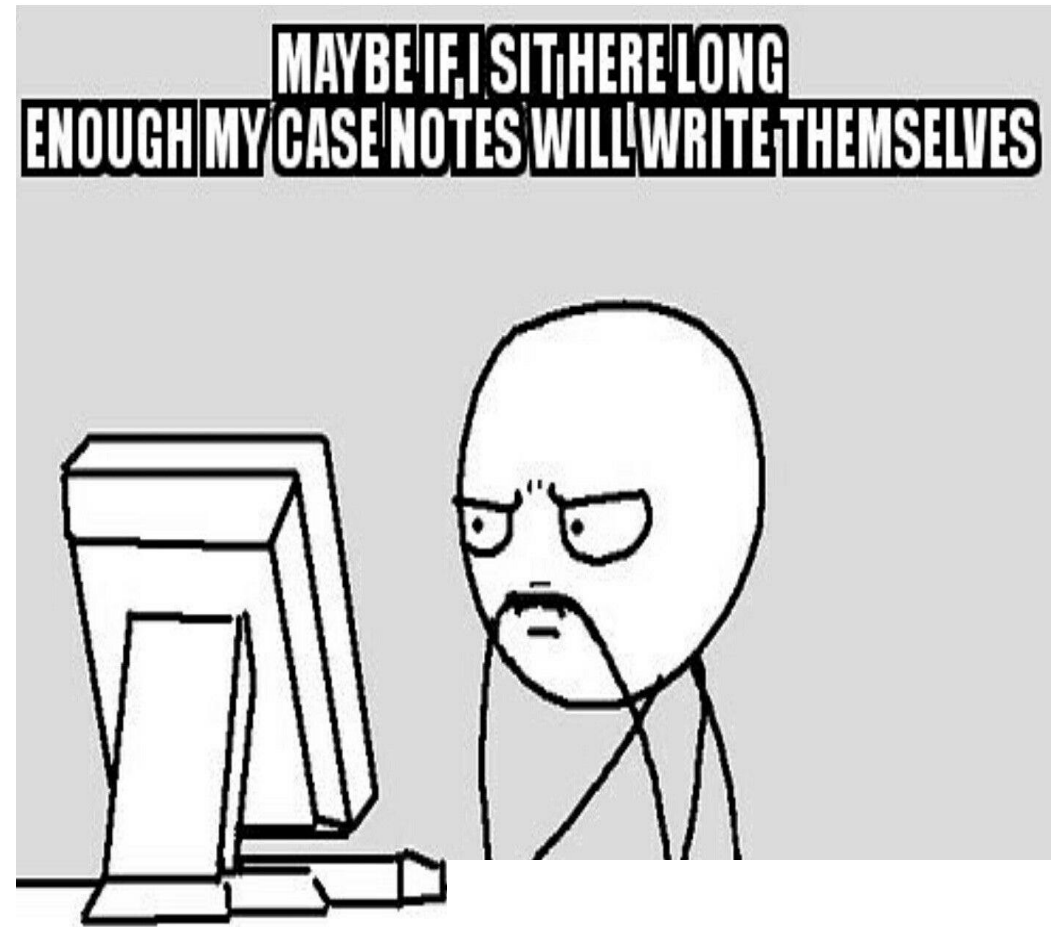
What's the Difference?



Types of Case Notes

- DAP
- SOAP

N.B. There are many other formats/expectations depending on where you are working as a social worker (e.g. YP, hospitals, SAPA, etc.)



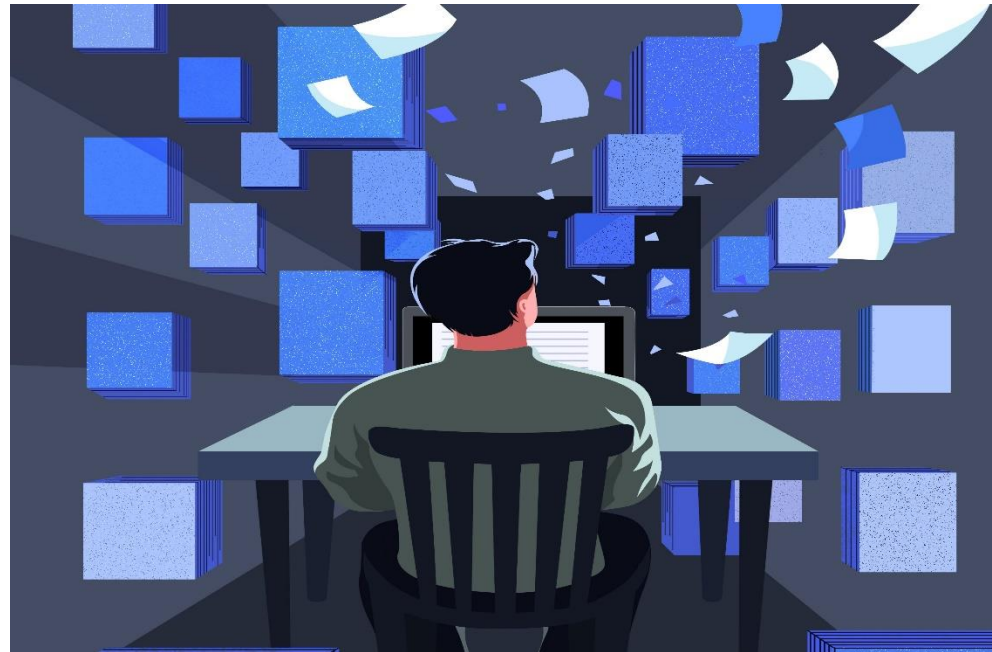
Data, Assess, Plan (DAP)

- Data: Focus of session, observations, predominant discussions (including significant client comments) and current concerns
- Assess: Current functioning, mental status (including mood, affect, etc.), client cooperation, changes in status, clinician's explanation of above data, etc.
- Plan: Homework/tasks to complete, significant future meetings, plans for next session



Case Note Activity 1

Using the template provided in the chat, write up a case note based on the role-play using **DAP format**



Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Plan (SOAP)

A Summarization of SOAP Definitions and Examples

Section	Definitions	Examples
Subjective (S)	What the client tells you What pertinent others tell you about the client Basically, how the client experiences the world	Client's feelings, concerns, plans, goals, and thoughts Intensity of problems and impact on relationships Pertinent comments by family, case managers, behavioral therapists, etc. Client's orientation to time, place, and person Client's verbalized changes toward helping
Objective (O)	Factual What the counselor personally observes/witnesses Quantifiable: what was seen, counted, smelled, heard, or measured Outside written materials received	The client's general appearance, affect, behavior Nature of the helping relationship Client's demonstrated strengths and weaknesses Test results, materials from other agencies, etc., are to be noted and attached.
Assessment (A)	Summarizes the counselor's clinical thinking A synthesis and analysis of the subjective and objective portion of the notes	For counselor: Include clinical diagnosis and clinical impressions (if any). For care providers: How would you label the client's behavior and the reasons (if any) for this behavior?
Plan (P)	Describes the parameters of treatment Consists of an action plan and prognosis	Action plan: Include interventions used, treatment progress, and direction. Counselors should include the date of next appointment. Prognosis: Include the anticipated gains from the interventions.

Do's & Don't for SOAP notes

Guidelines for Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan (SOAP) Noting

Do	Avoid
Be brief and concise.	Avoid using names of other clients, family members, or others named by client.
Keep quotes to a minimum.	Avoid terms like seems, appears.
Use an active voice.	Avoid value-laden language, common labels, opinionated statements.
Use precise and descriptive terms.	Do not use terminology unless trained to do so.
Record immediately after each session.	Do not erase, obliterate, use correction fluid, or in any way attempt to obscure mistakes.
Start each new entry with date and time of session.	Do not leave blank spaces between entries.
Write legibly and neatly.	Do not try to squeeze additional commentary between lines or in margins.
Use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.	
Document all contacts or attempted contacts.	
Use only black ink if notes are handwritten.	
Sign-off using legal signature, plus your title.	

Case Note Activity 2

Using the template provided in the chat, write up a case note based on the following case note using the **SOAP** format



Case Study A

Cecil is a 34-year-old man who was mandated by the courts to obtain counseling to resolve his problems with domestic violence. He comes into the office, slams the door, and announces in a loud and irritated voice, “This counseling stuff is crap! There’s no parking! My wife and kids are gone! And I gotta pay for something that don’t work!”

Throughout most of the counseling session Cecil remains agitated. Speaking in an angry and aggressive voice, he tells you that his probation officer told him he was a good man and could get his wife and kids back. He demands to know why you are not really helping him get back what is most important to him. He insists that “Mary just screws everything up!” He goes on to tell you of a violent argument he and Mary had last night regarding the privileges of their daughter Nicole, who just turned 16. You are aware that there is a restraining order against Cecil.

During the session, you learn Cecil was raised in a physically and verbally abusive family until he was 11, at which time he was placed in protective custody by social services, where he remained until he was 18. He goes on to tell you that he has been arrested numerous times for “brawling” and reports that sometimes the littlest things make him angry and he just explodes, hitting whatever is available—the walls, his wife, the kids, and three guys at work. Cecil also reports

prior arrests for domestic violence. He admits that at various times, he has been both physically and emotionally abusive to Mary and the children but insists that it was needed “to straighten them out.” Just before leaving your office, Cecil rushes from his chair and stands within a foot of you. Angrily, with his fists and jaw clenched, he says, “This is the same old B.S. You guys are just all talk.” He storms from the room.

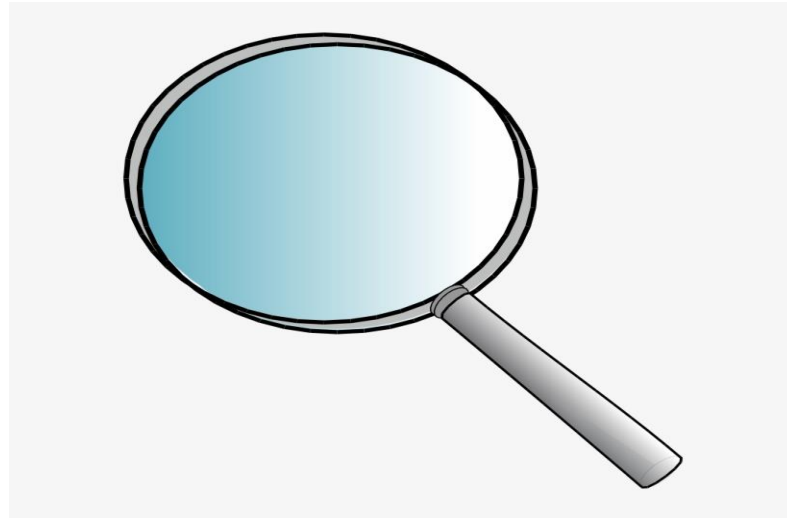


Case Study A – Sample SOAP Note

7/7/01. 2 p.m. (S) Reports counseling is not helping him get his family back. Insists the use of violence has been needed to “straighten out” family members. Reports history of domestic violence. Recent history: States he met and verbally fought with his wife yesterday regarding the privileges of oldest child. Personal history: childhood physical and mental abuse resulting in foster care placement, ages 11–18. (O) Generally agitated throughout the session. Toward the end of the session stood up, with clenched fists and jaw, angrily stated that counseling is “same old B.S.!” Rushed out of office. (A) Physical Abuse of Adult [V61.1, *DSM* code] and Child(ren) [V61.21]. Clinical impressions: Rule out Intermittent Explosive Disorder given bouts of uncontrolled rage with non-specific emotional trigger. (P) Rescheduled for 7/14/01 @ 2 p.m.; prognosis guarded due to low level of motivation to change. Continue cognitive therapy. Refer to Dr. Smith for psychiatric/medication evaluation. Referred to Men’s Alternative to Violence Group. Next session, introduce use of “time-outs.” S. Cameron, Ph.D., LPCC (signature).

Case Note Activity 3

Review the following case note and try to identify as many errors as possible (there are a total of 41 errors!)



Case Study B

Family members mentioned in the document	Abbreviations used in the document
Anna Gramme, 23 (mother) Ben, male, 4 Isabel, female, 18 mos Kevin, male, 4 mos Johnetta, 41 (MGM)	CPI = Child Protective Investigator CPS = Child Protective Services (state child welfare department) MGM = maternal grandmother (Johnetta) FSCI = Fredonia State Correction Institution (state prison) FCH = Fredonia Children's Hospital; mos = months

ORIGINAL NOTE: Anna is 23. She is a single mother with 3 children (Ben 4, Isabel 18 mos, Kevin 4 mos). CPI investigated Isabel falling down from the 3rd floor landing to the second. Anna was inside, changing Kevin. Isabel broke her left leg. Although, no prior history as a parent. Anna was at Fredonia house child shelter for 9 months when she was 17 due to wayward behavior. In addition, she was also a victim of neglect when she was 7 do to her mothers' (Johnetta) alcohol abuse. Fortunately, Johnetta cooperated with CPS during both openings and reported that she's been sober since Anna was 11. The childrens father is at the FSCI. CPI indicated [confirmed] the case for lack of supervision and the case was opened to CPS. 6 Weeks after the first opening, Isabel is taken to FCH again. This time with 3rd degree burns. She was in the tub, with the drain open waiting for Anna to give her a bath, Kevin started to cry and Anna went into the next room. Ben came into the bathroom and turned on the hot water to "help". The water temperature being 120 degrees. Kevin sustained burns consistent with the explanation

Case Study 2 cont.

- **Safety Decision:** Children are conditionally safe.
- **Safety Plan:** Anna realizes that she has become overwhelmed caring for 3 small children. Anna asks MGM to come and stay with them for 2 weeks as Isabel will need additional care when she is released from the hospital. At that point MGM has stated that she could continue to support Anna by visiting several times per week and assisting with families night time routine (dinner, bath, bedtime). CPS has spoken with MGM and confirmed that MGM is both able and willing to assist; and that MGM understands and agrees with her role in the safety plan. In addition, Anna has also notified the Landlord whom will lower the temperature on the water heater. MGM states that she will purchase a safety gate this week to put at the top of the staircase. Anna will also go through the home and identify additional safety hazards and develop a specific plan to address each hazard.

CORRECTION: Case Study 2

CASE 2: CORRECTED VERSION

Each number in the corrected version refers to an explanation below.

Anna is 23. She is a single mother with three ① children (Ben, 4, Isabel, 18 months, Kevin, four-months). CPI investigated Isabel falling down from the third floor landing to the second. Anna was inside the apartment ② at the time ③, changing Kevin's diaper ④. Isabel broke her left leg. Although ⑤ Anna has no ⑥ history of neglect ⑦ as a parent, ⑧ she was at Fredonia House Child Shelter ⑨ for nine ⑩ months when she was 17 years old, ⑪ due to wayward behavior. ⑫ She was also a victim of neglect when she was 7, ⑬ due ⑭ to her mother's ⑮ (Johnetta) alcohol abuse. ⑯ Johnetta has ⑰ cooperated with CPS during both openings and reports ⑱ that she has ⑲ been sober since Anna was 11. The children's ⑳ father is at the FSCI. CPI indicated (confirmed) the case for lack of supervision, ㉑ and the case was opened to CPS.

Six ㉒ weeks ㉓ after the first opening, Isabel was ㉔ taken to FCH again. This time, she had third-degree burns ㉕. She was in the tub, with the drain open, ㉖ waiting for Anna to give her a bath ㉗. Kevin started to cry and Anna went into the

CORRECTION: Case Study 2

next room. Ben came into the bathroom and turned on the hot water to “help.” (28) The water temperature was 120 degrees, and the child sustained burns consistent with the explanation.

Safety Decision:

Children are conditionally safe.

Safety Plan:

Anna realizes that caring for three (29) small children overwhelms her. Anna asked (30) MGM to stay (31) for two (32) weeks, (33) as Isabel will need additional care when she is released from the hospital. MGM states that she could continue to support Anna after Isabel returns home, by visiting several times per week and assisting with the family’s nighttime routine (dinner, bath, bedtime) (34). CPS has spoken with MGM and confirmed that MGM is both able and willing to assist (35) and that MGM understands and agrees with her role in the safety plan. In addition, Anna has (36) notified the landlord (37), (38) who (39) will lower the temperature on the water heater. MGM states that she will purchase a safety gate this week to put at the top of the staircase. Anna will also go through the home, (40) identify additional safety hazards, (41) and develop a specific plan to address each hazard.

Explanations of Corrections: Case Study 2

EXPLANATIONS OF CORRECTIONS

1. Spell out numbers one through ten, except ages.
2. "The apartment" added for clarity.
3. "At the time" added for clarity.
4. "Diaper" added for clarity.
5. There is no comma required after one-word introductory conjunction.
6. "Prior" is redundant with "history."
7. "Of neglect" added for clarity.
8. Insert comma between subordinate and independent clauses.
9. Capitalize proper noun: the agency's title.
10. Spell out numbers one through ten, except ages.
11. Insert comma between independent clause and phrase.
12. Delete "In addition" because it is redundant with "also."
13. Insert comma between independent clause and phrase.
14. Homophone error: do and due—"do" is an action; "due" refers to a deadline.
15. Use singular possessive: mother's ("mothers'" is plural possessive) – several mothers' alcohol abuse.
16. Delete "fortunately" because it is the writer's opinion, not a professional observation.
17. Use "has cooperated" because it is proper tense, as it took place over time in the past, and continues in the present.
18. The verb "reports" could be present tense because it is happening now, or past tense, because it happened at one time before. Here the proper verb tense is an option.
19. Spell out "she has"; contractions should be avoided in professional writing.
20. Plural possessive of children is children's—more than one child possess the noun "father".
21. Insert comma before a connecting conjunction (two independent clauses).
22. Spell out numbers at beginning of sentences.
23. The word "weeks" should not be capitalized because it does not begin a sentence.
24. Incorrect verb tense; events occurred in the past.
25. Incomplete sentence: "This time with 3rd degree burns" lacks a verb. We rewrote the sentence with a verb (had), and corrected "3rd degree" as "third-degree."
26. Commas should bracket a phrase that may be removed without substantially changing the sentence's meaning.
27. Run-on sentence error. Use a period to replace the comma and create two complete sentences.

Explanations of Corrections: Case Study 2

EXPLANATIONS OF CORRECTIONS

28. Period location: period goes inside close-quotation mark.
29. We reorganized the sentence for active writing and clarity. Spell out numbers from one through ten, except ages.
30. Past tense should be used: "Anna asked."
31. Avoid redundant language: "come and" is redundant with "stay."
32. Spell out numbers from one through ten, except ages.
33. Insert comma before a connecting conjunction and to link two independent clauses. Also, the word "as" is not an "official" connecting conjunction, but suffices for documentation purposes.
34. The original sentence, "At that point MGM has stated that she could continue to support Anna by visiting several times per week and assisting with families night time routine (dinner, bath, bedtime)" had several errors: "at this point" is unnecessary verbiage and there is verb tense disagreement with "has stated"; the word "could" should replace "can" (present tense); the word "families" should be "family's" to indicate the singular possessive; nighttime should be a closed compound; we inserted "after Isabel returns home" for clarity. Here is the corrected sentence: "MGM states that she can continue to support Anna after Isabel returns home by visiting several times per week and assisting with the family's nighttime routine (dinner, bath, and bedtime)."
35. Semicolon was incorrectly used because the subsequent phrase is not a complete sentence. Semicolons separate two complete sentences or items in a list.
36. Delete "also" because it is redundant with "in addition."
37. The word "landlord" should not be capitalized because it is a common noun.
38. Insert comma to separate an independent clause from phrase.
39. "Who" is correct; "whom" is used if it does not take a verb. In this case, "who" takes the verb "will lower."
- 40 & 41. Insert commas to separate independent clause from phrases.